

Haywards Heath Town Council – A plan for the future – July 2023

This green paper is a discussion document and is intended to scope the key policies to be followed by Haywards Heath Town Council (HHTC) over the next few years. Detailed budgets and action plans will be discussed by the Town Council and its committees to give effect to the policies outlined.

Introduction

Our vision for Haywards Heath into the middle of the 21st century is of a vibrant town community in the heart of a Sussex that is a desirable place to live in, study in and work in. With excellent connections to London and the south coast, Haywards Heath should offer all that is necessary to a modern home-based lifestyle within the town.

Haywards Heath Town Council (HHTC) aims to keep a successful local shopping environment with a good variety of small shops and national chain stores providing for local needs and minimising the need for residents to travel further afield. In the era of increasing options to buy on-line with local delivery it is important to retain a successful local retail centre and food and drink venues which can be accessed quickly and safely to keep alive our high streets and the heart of our town.

Travel into and out of the area by public transport needs to be backed up with more frequent and extensive local bus and community transport around town for those who need help and to reduce traffic in the town centre, reducing pollution and taking pressure off parking. We aim to make it easier to find timetables and fares, which should be available at bus stops and on-line, as well as introduce a straightforward lower priced fare structure.

The Town Council intends to discuss the concept of the “15 minute city” / “20 minute neighbourhood” with the aim of improving local planning and helping residents reduce the need for traveling by car in their daily lives, for shops, work, medical and education services and entertainment etc.

The town needs a better mapped and signposted network of cycle and foot paths to connect people across the town. The Town Council aims to improve these connections so enabling safe and efficient journeys to the shops, railway station, schools and hospital / medical centres etc.

HHTC values and wants to advocate the town’s entertainment and cultural venues and promote events, support its business community and recognise its educational and health services.

HHTC has a key role to play as champion for the town and its people and can also provide a more accessible resource for the community. The Council intends to enhance the Town Council’s on-line presence by using the council website to help signpost local organisations, charities, businesses, events etc for the benefit of the community.

The Town Council aims to update and issue a new town guide to promote the town community, its voluntary organisations, businesses, social activities and events to residents and visitors.

The Town Council intends to lead the community by achieving fair trade status. The Council will also discuss and decide how it can best support the Transition Town Initiative.

The Town Council intends to look to adopt policies which recognise our wider environment and aim to work with others to help address the climate change and bio-diversity challenges we all face.

Haywards Heath's growth

Recent housing developments beyond the current Town Council boundaries, but to all intents part of Haywards Heath, should be reflected in the town's planning. HHTC will work with neighbouring parishes to ensure these new residents are included in our forward planning. In due course some of these new developments will become fully part of the town and HHTC recognises that their residents are already users of the town's services, contribute to the local economy and its community.

The Town Council intends to create a greater Haywards Heath neighbourhood forum to talk with the surrounding parishes and tackle matters of common interest. This could include; Cuckfield, Ansty and Staplefield, Lindfield, Lindfield Rural and Wivelsfield / Chailey parishes.

Policies and initiatives:

The Role of the Town Council

Champion the Town and its residents and businesses, helping create and support a thriving community based on the Town.

Work in partnership with local groups, voluntary organisations and charities, not for profit bodies etc.

Champion the town's infrastructure in developments and work with agencies to achieve the best outcomes for the Town and its residents.

Clair Hall

The existing policy of HHTC is to support recommissioning of Clair Hall as a new Arts and Cultural venue. This policy lacks a plan and there was no clarity from Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) about how this would come about. As a result, the Hall has been closed to public use for three years, and aside from the vital use as a Covid vaccination centre when there was no other suitable venue in the area, has no progress to show for that time. Many community groups have been deprived of a useful central community hall and this has had a detrimental impact on them and on the Town.

HHTC intends to pursue a policy of getting the hall back into use and then look to change its ownership to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation or similar, with the Town Council as the key custodian for the Hall and sponsor for its use to the benefit of the Town community. HHTC proposes to work fast to get the hall back into use.

HHTC will work with MSDC and other stakeholders and partners to achieve these aims. We understand that there are grants and assistance available which would help in re-opening the hall and in increasing its use and utility.

In addition to the hall there are other related and neighbouring community assets which the Town Council intends to champion as part of the strategy, including:

- The Redwood Centre
- Clair Park and the sports pavilion
- Clair Hall car park
- Footpaths and cycleways

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These facilities are used by many individuals and groups and the Town Council has a unique role to help coordinate the various stakeholders.

The Town has an aspiration to take over the ownership and management of Clair Park. We would look to establish a 'friends' group' to encourage and channel community support.

Nature

HHTC aims to increase and support nature, our wild plants and animals, including pollinators. The council intends to support bird and bat nest boxes in the town's woodland. This can be done in our parks, council grounds, cemeteries and other open spaces as well as supporting local groups and residents to do the same. Improving our natural environment will contribute to residents' well-being and alongside other policies of supporting buses, EV charging points and trees planted in the ground in South Road will improve air quality in the town centre.

The Council intends to obtain advice from conservation agencies including Wakehurst Place (Kew) and the Sussex Wildlife Trust who are based in our area.

South Road Upgrade and Traffic Management

Street scape and aesthetics

HHTC generally welcomes the West Sussex County Council (WSSC) proposed improvements to South Road and to Commercial Square.

The Council supports the lowering of speed limits to 20mph across the centre of the town, widening the footways, planting trees in the ground and enhancing the street scape with coordinated design and colour schemes to discourage through traffic and reduce speeds. Making the traffic go slower will help encourage cyclists, pedestrians will feel safer, and the town centre will look and feel a nicer place to live and to visit.

The Town council intends to work with WSSC to review on-street parking zones and times. The recent change to a 1-hour parking scheme in South Road will be reviewed to understand its effects. The Town Council intends to work with MSDC to review how well off-street car parking operates. The council will promote provision of electric vehicle charging points across town.

Additional street schemes

The planned improvements to South Road should be reflected in similar upgrades for The Broadway and Sussex Road. HHTC intends to work with WSSC to seek similar schemes to reduce traffic speed, improve street furniture, plant in ground trees, improve experience for residents / visitors and upgrade for cyclists, pedestrians, review parking scheme. Work with the town's retail / food and drink businesses.

The council intends to liaise with Network Rail and rail operators about street and other improvements for the station quarter.

Traffic management

There are several roads in the town centre where there are insufficient car parking spaces for residents (Gower Road, Haywards Road etc.) The Town Council intends to consult with residents to understand if there is support for CPZs or other changes.

The Council aims to revisit previous proposals for a 'gyratory system' referred to in the town's masterplan (Destination Haywards Heath document) which included one ways and changes to traffic flow in the centre of the town.

Given the changes to lifestyles following covid, other developments in road usage and the WSCC proposals for changes in South Road, the existing Town Council proposals will be revisited as they are not compatible. The council does not want to foster rat runs but rather to discourage through traffic, direct HGVs to use the relief road and to encourage pedestrians and more local use of cycling.

HHTC aims to target Gander Hill, College Road, Sydney Road, Paddockhall Road, Harlands Road, Northlands Avenue and other busy local roads for speed reduction, road safety and measures to reduce pollution and improve amenity.

The council aims to invest in traffic speed monitoring devices which could be deployed around the town in conjunction with the Police to help provide advisory information for motorists to encourage speed reduction.

Potholes

The Town Council has asked WSCC to delegate powers and budget to allow the Town Council to undertake pothole repairs on non-major roads across the town and in agreement with surrounding parishes.

The Town Council believes that it could be quicker and more effective in resolution of reported potholes and is willing to help tackle the challenge, but it can only do this if WSCC allows it and pays over part of the income it receives to mend potholes.

Cycling and walking routes

The Town Council aims to map cycle routes around and through town, produce an online map of footpaths and cycle ways and link into longer distance cycle routes joining Haywards Heath. This plan will be reviewed against the local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, consulting with stakeholders including, WSCC, a local Cycle Forum, footpath user groups and residents generally.

The council wants to see better cycle racks in key places which fit in with the street scape.

Accessibility across town

Access for those with disabilities can be improved with better signage and information to help with planning visits to public and commercial buildings, shops and entertainment venues. The Town Council intends to take the lead and work with charities to help make the town more accessible. The council intends to provide help and advice and grants to help improve access.

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Victoria Park

The Town Council notes that there is a plan from MSDC to upgrade the park and its facilities. The present plan is to upgrade the children's play area in the north-east corner of the park which the Town Council welcomes. HHTC will review the provision of accessible play equipment across our local playgrounds.

The northern boundary with South Road is also due to be improved and the council is interested to know how this is to be achieved. There is concern that the existing hedges and plantings may be a haven for wildlife and should not be lost. The planting of more trees could help improve shelter and reduce pollution in the town centre.

The Town has an aspiration to take over the ownership and management of Victoria Park. We look to establish a 'friends group' to encourage and channel community support.

Community Warden scheme

The Town Council is participating in and pioneered the local community warden scheme. The removal of PCSOs nationally means that the warden scheme potentially fills a gap that might otherwise lead to increased nuisance crimes. The warden scheme also helps link businesses to the community. The scheme will be reviewed and evaluated to determine whether/how successful it has been and what lessons we can learn from it.

Community and Social Matters

HHTC will champion the rights and interests of the community it serves. There are sections of the population who need help and support from governmental agencies. There are areas of deprivation and hidden poverty. The council will look to use its influence to ensure that these areas get the support needed to improve the lives of those residents affected. This will include, amongst other initiatives, support for community hubs, foodbanks and youth programmes.

Grants and community outreach

Generally, the Town Council wants to see an increase in grants to help local groups and particularly help with young people and charities / voluntary organisations. But the Town Council could also help individuals, recognise achievements and encourage people to be community minded.

Community outreach – Town Council aims to identify what resources and assets exist in the town and help people to connect. The website is a useful tool for the community and the Town Council intends to grow this with the intention to link and signpost different groups, help connect people and develop messaging on social media.

Local businesses

A successful local business community is key to providing jobs for local people and sustaining a strong local economy. As well as the valued High Street retailers, there are many other businesses across the town - they have an important role to play by providing jobs and supporting a healthy local economy. The Town Council intends to help provide support for those looking to start up their

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own business through facilitating training and advice sessions at the Town Hall and providing grants to help locals with setting up as traders in the town for instance to contribute to the costs for a stall / pop up shop or basic equipment.

The Town Council aims to generally help local businesses to flourish and encourage them to be involved in the town community.

Destination Haywards Heath review and Haywards Heath Local Plan review

The council will review the “Destination Haywards Heath” strategy and Haywards Heath Local (Neighbourhood) Plan which will need to dovetail with the Mid Sussex District Council’s Plan. The MSDC plan will be reviewed by MSDC in the next year.

This vision document sets out new thinking which we aim to include in these Plans for the future of the town.

Hurst Farm development

The Town Council is looking to the proposed development to the south-east of the town to help achieve its aims for a new cemetery, additional allotments and a country park for the benefit of the town. A new local school is also planned as part of the development. The Council will work with MSDC and developers to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Education and training are important to the town and the HHTC intends to reach out to and work with the local schools and college to involve the town’s youth in helping to shape the future.

The council wishes to support adult further education working with WSCC and other agencies, linking in with U3A and seeking to support opportunities for adults to improve their knowledge, retrain and add skills.

Health and Social Care

Health care and social care are very important. The Princess Royal Hospital is a vital local service which the Town Council wants to support. The Nuffield Hospital is also valued.

Care homes are a significant local asset. Support for carers of all types is a key priority for the Town Council as we see an increasing population which relies on its carers. The Town Council will seek ways to support care services and those involved in providing care.

The Council will support installation of defibrillators in conjunction with WSCC and participate in organising training in their use.

Proposals for Active Haywards Heath will include in the short term: identifying and auditing (to cover scope, risks and legal compliance) sports / exercise facilities, pitches and equipment for public use within ten miles of Haywards Heath and encourage residents’ use. Identify and promote non-competitive activities e.g. walking groups and re-work Haywards Heath Active web site.

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Haywards Heath Active will set up a steering group to support and drive a programme of actions and to communicate with the public and to promote activities.

In the longer term HHTC intends to support the use of grants, make it easier for groups to apply for a grant and promote the outcome of grants. The Council aims to promote expansion of facilities with awards and recognition, e.g., for vision, inclusion, benefits to wider population, creative solutions, bringing work to the town. The Council aims to review and facilitate building of proposed new sites, funding, commercial collaboration and grants available, management (commercial or council), promote inclusion. The council aims to look to support improvements to existing facilities, e.g. improvements to enable multi-purpose outdoor pitches to be used throughout the year and give priority to sites which enable multi-use activities.

Town Twinning

HHTC intends to reaffirm its commitment to support the Town's twinning with Bondues and Traunstein. The Council believes in the value of working with neighbours in Europe to foster friendship and encourages regular meetings and exchanges and acknowledges the good work of the Twinning Association in building links with our twin towns.

The Town Council intends to promote with pride our Twinning by: 1. naming a local street after Bondues and 2. erecting a commemorative street direction / distance signpost in the town centre that points to both Bondues and Traunstein.

Finance, tax and expenditure policy / philosophy

Our mission is to provide better services and ensure that the residents of Haywards Heath are best served, get value for money and can see the benefits of their Town Council. A clear implication of the policies outlined above is that taxes may need to rise to pay for specific projects and these will be justified by the outcomes to be achieved.

If we can grow the council's revenue and invest in better services for the community we serve, then the town will enjoy the benefits.

Recently HHTC has been driven by a policy of very low tax for the sake of it. The consequences of this are a low council tax in Haywards Heath but little else to show for the tax that is raised. The base tax is £61.57 per annum for a house in Band D in 2023/4. This compares with approx. £76.51 for Burgess Hill, £75.82 for Lindfield and £154.03 for Cuckfield.

HHTC aims to seek a town / parish levy from developers in partnership with MSDC. The revenues raised could fund additional community infrastructure: paths, lighting and seating, bus shelters etc. and where possible allotments and community gardens.

The Town Council will look to attract commercial sponsors and partners to support the Council's activities and events.

The Town Council aims to look to improve the quality of life for all residents. Benefits should not be measured just in direct monetary terms and so our policy guidance and justification will include allowing for the social and environmental benefits of Council policies.

The town council will seek to achieve its financial requirements and continue to meet its audit and statutory obligations. It will develop a forward financial plan for the next three years to be updated on a rolling annual basis.

Council Performance - Best in Class

HHTC aims to obtain an accreditation to demonstrate that it is one of the best local Councils in the country through the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Local Council Award Scheme. The scheme is designed to provide a model framework in which local councils are benchmarked for their work using standardised criteria set by NALC's Improvement and Development Board. The awards recognise those who meet and surpass these expectations after rigorous and thorough peer review.

The Local Council Award Scheme will help to ensure and recognise that HHTC has good governance, effective community engagement and engages in continuous council improvement.